

Rotating News Article for release the Week of August 8, 2005

By: Daniel E. Mullins

Extension Horticulture Agent

Santa Rosa County

Great Expectations Accompany the New Tractor

The new tractor is finally here! After months of attempting to justify the purchase as well as stretching the family budget, I am all set to do some serious storm clean-up, re-landscaping and vegetable gardening.

Regular readers will recall that we visited this subject during the holidays last winter. At that time, I attempted to convince my loved ones that a new tractor would make a great gift. My plan didn't work at the time, but the seed was planted. Our situation changed since then, making the tractor a possibility. My teen aged son was sold on the idea and also greatly helped in accomplishing the ultimate goal.

Soon after that December article, the boy and I became tractor shoppers – visiting every dealership within driving distance. Each dealer seemed knowledgeable, courteous and patient. I mention patient because I am sure that we represented a challenge with each visit.

Since we knew that funds were limited, we had to have absolutely as much for our money as possible. Consequently, we took a methodical approach as potential consumers. Great long lists of questions were prepared prior to traveling to each dealership and it quickly became evident that this was turning into an educational experience. The tractor ownership education continues as we have already encountered some unexpected events.

Work Progressing – Even Overdone

Storm cleanup on three acres is not an easy job, but the spouse was convinced by the two males of the house that it would be easy with the new tractor. Soon after it arrived, she was away for a few days. In the mean time, downed trees from Hurricane Ivan and Dennis were drug out of the weeds, cut up and hauled to the roadside. Once this was accomplished, the affected brushy and weedy areas were chopped up with a heavy duty rotary cutter. The area that was once head high in green vegetation and fallen trees now resembles a pasture.

Upon her arrival I was not greeted with praise for all of this hard work. Instead, I was talked to rather sternly about how things had been overdone. Prior to the cleanup efforts, neighbors' houses to the West could not be seen. That is not the case now. Though we have great neighbors, I have been instructed to re-establish some plants for screening purposes – and after all of that work!

One thing often leads to another and such is the case with the new tractor. The first discovery was that it would not fit in the garage due to the height of the Rollover Protective System (ROPS) which extends about a foot higher than the entrance. So, now we need a storage shed for the tractor and equipment.

Three pieces of equipment were included in the original purchase – a front – end loader which is an indispensable item, a rotary cutter (commonly known as a bush hog) and a landscape blade. We already see the need for a tiller, disc harrow, finishing mower and a trailer. I guess it's time to look at the budget again.

We are now preparing an area for erecting the tractor storage shed. Unfortunately the ideal place was determined to be exactly where my potted plant collection is located. Yesterday was spent sorting plants, stacking pots and otherwise clearing the area. Obviously the new tractor was brought into service once more.

Next is the job of removing several more hazardous trees that were left during earlier storm debris cleanup. I expect the front-end loader to be a big help in transporting large sections of these cut up tree trunks.

The ultimate goal, and this was an implied promise I guess, is to completely renovate our landscape and make it a show place. I am over the barrel because I had a landscape design and installation business for twelve years prior to beginning work here as an Extension Agent. My spouse has seen my work and is ready for this knowledge and experience to be applied in our own landscape. Now that the new tractor is here, I am out of excuses. I will report on our adventure next summer, even sooner if enough progress is made.